Blue Eyes

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by PockyGhost

Summary

Teen!Hannibal has moved to the U.S. with his uncle and aunt, still traumatized by the horrors he faced, including the death of his parents and beloved sister. He is struggling to build his human-suit when he meets a young boy with an affinity for dogs, who happens to remind him both of his late sister and of his own self.

Notes

This entire fic will be posted while unedited, and when it's finished I'll go back through and edit it, I just have no idea when. That said, if you notice any quick-fixes please let me know and I'll get right on that. This should be updated fairly often, at least once a week. Enjoy!

Chapter 1

Hannibal sat down gently on the edge of a park bench, trying to keep dirt and creases off his school uniform. Though there was a bus which drove by his Uncle Robert's house, it was not so very far that he couldn't walk—he enjoyed the silence and solitude it afforded him. Also, the other students at his school became more daring off campus with the lone bus driver to keep them in line. It didn't bother him much; he could hold his own, except that any fights were reported to Lady Murasaki who was disappointed in him, unless he had been protecting one of the younger boys. "To protect others takes great courage; to cause violence only because you know you will win shows a lack of restraint. You always take it too far," she had told him, and he agreed. There was no sport in harming the other boys, he always won when they forced him to react, and he only ever reacted out of anger and not out of true self-defense. Lady Murasaki's advice was always to be held in high esteem.

Reflecting on her speeches about decorum and appearances, he let his body cool until there was no longer a risk of sweating through his clothes. Just as he was going to stand, a disheveled young boy burts through the bushes beside him, looking around frantically. The boy turned, looking as though he hoped a new perspective would perhaps reveal a multitude of people. However, the part of the park they were in was fairly quiet, and the boy's gaze fell on Hannibal.

"Do you have any food?" the boy demanded, as if whether or not Hannibal had any leftover lunch would determine how the boy judged him for eternity. As a matter of fact he did, and he only hesitated in giving it to the boy long enough to assess him. The boy was thin, thinner than he should be, but he didn't look starved. He looked innocent. Like Misha.

Hannibal offered out his uneaten sandwich from his pack.

The boy's face burst into a smile, revealing a lost tooth in the back of his grin. Misha had been too young to lose any teeth yet, but it wasn't without charm. "Thank you!" and he ran back into the bushes just as quickly as he had come out.

Hannibal was intrigued, as he so seldom was since moving to the United States. Day to day life was so bland here that he could hardly resist the pull of a mystery. So he followed the boy. With so much plant debris under the bushes and so much wild growth further back among the trees, it wasn't hard to see the path previously taken. He only had to observe where leaves were brushed away and dandelion stalks bend over to be crushed against the ground.

When he came upon the boy, he was not eating as Hannibal thought he would be. The curly head was bent over a dog, probably a mutt from the lack of identifiable characteristics, with an obviously lame foreleg and a few puppies feeding off her nipples as the boy broke the sandwich into tiny bites and fed them to her.

It didn't take long for the mother dog to realize a stranger was near her family, and she turned to growl at him menacingly without attempting to get up. The boy turned quickly after, his

upper lip pulled back like the dog's in a growl. When he recognized it was Hannibal, surprise took over his face. He let out a gentle "oh", and then went back to soothing the new mother.

"Shh, Nilla, shh," the boy cooed. But Hannibal could see the difference in him. When asking for food and now that he realized someone was here, the boy's posture screamed alertness. But when he thought he was alone with the animals, he had been at peace. It reminded him, again, of Misha. Of how she was so close to him, how she felt free to be herself with him even as they lived through hell. Of how she learned to always been ready for pain in the presence of others. And it reminded him of himself.

He still hadn't regained his voice, despite the therapy Uncle Robert insisted on, and so he couldn't quiet the boy with words. Instead, he slowly got to his knees and pulled a second sandwich out of his satchel. Hannibal packed his own lunches, and though he seldom ate them, inevitably someone noticed if the materials didn't go missing. Instead of wasting them, he often would feed the birds at the manmade lake, but he figured that they could forage for themselves today while this dog could not. He set the second sandwich halfway between them.

The boy looked grateful and pulled the baggy over to himself before he finished breaking up the first, like he was nervous the offer might be rescinded. They sat in silence until both sandwiches were gone, the dog eating slower as she kept an eye on him the entire time. It was obvious she didn't trust humans, even if she did accept the child.

"Thanks again," the boy said, offering back the empty baggies. "Dad gets mad when he sees me sneaking out food, and I couldn't risk getting grounded when Nilla just had babies since she can't walk around so well." Blue eyes tracked all around his face but avoided contact with his own, expecting a response. It wasn't until about a minute later when the boy accepted there was none coming and looked into his eyes.

"Oh, you don't talk. That's okay, sometimes I don't like to talk either and I won't say anything for a few days but if I don't answer Mrs. Arrant's questions in class, she tells my Dad and then I get in trouble, so I have to talk in class." Despite how the boy was rambling on, he believed him about the silence. It may have had something to do with the resemblance he saw to himself.

The boy suddenly thrust out his hand, somewhat startling Hannibal and the protective Nilla. "Oh, by the way, my name's Will, what's yours?"

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> Same rules of editing apply as to the first chapter-- if it's quick, just let me know and I'd be glad to fix it. When the story is finished, I'll go back through and clean everything up more thoroughly. Thanks for reading!

Hannibal took hold of the hand offered to him, to deny the shake would have been rude, but he didn't even attempt to give his name as he knew nothing would come out. Will made eye contact for another quick second.

"You can write it down and I can read it, that would be okay if you wanted to."

Hannibal released his hand and pulled out a pencil and his physics notebook-- he hardly used it anyways, the class moved much slower than Hannibal's mind. "My name is Hannibal" he wrote out precisely. When Will took it, his brows wrinkled in concentration.

"Hanni-ball." The child put extra emphasis on the ‘i’ and ‘-all’ sounds, so that it hardly sounded like his name at all. Will blushed. "Sorry, I can read really good, but I've not heard your name before, not any of my friends have it. But that's okay, no one in my class is named William either, so it's not so bad. The three Emmas in Mrs. Arrant's have to be called by their last name initials too so we know who she's calling and it's kind of annoying."

Just one of the many things the other students at Hannibal's all boys school made fun of him about was his name, and it was just one of the many things he ignored. He liked his name, it was unique and set him apart from the American masses and it reminded him of his lineage every time he was called. But Will defending his name did not soften his, it was the mispronunciation despite best attempts. Children often struggled with his name, though they were usually younger. Perhaps it was the lack of vocal guidance, but it made the boy seem even younger to butcher his name. Hannibal smiled and wrote his reply.

"You read it very well," Will read the words off the page much smoother than he had previously. "I know," he started speaking for himself, "Mr. Croom from last year said I was gifted and a good learner! But Dad is disappointed because I haven't got any letters saying I'm smart this year, so I have to try harder."

Hannibal was not a very good judge of intelligence in younger children, as he had been told that he was much brighter than the average and had learned to read very young and by himself, and Misha had been tutored by him to be ahead of the curve as well. But he knew that in the U.S. children were taught to memorize often used words in kindergarten, and that his name would be hard to muddle through. He wondered and wrote "How old are you?" in the same strict lettering as before.

"I'm six. But my dad says that six is old enough for me to go to the park by myself as long as I don't talk to any adults who aren't moms." A horrified look came over Will's face. "Are you a grown up?"

Hannibal shook his head ‘no’, amused. Was Will only this open with people who helped his with animals and that was why his father trusted him to go out alone? Hannibal's face closed off as he contemplated a darker possibility. Was Will's father perhaps ignorant or neglectful enough to not realize his boy was prime material for a kidnapping? Young children were so trusting, even if told not to be, and young boys did not get quite the same talk about going with strangers as girls did. Will had come out of the bushes in a secluded area, what if some monster offered to give him food if he would just come to their house to get it? Or used the American stereotype of asking Will to help with the search of a lost puppy?

Hannibal remembered how easy it was for Grutas to get him to follow. All he did was offer to get Misha a glass of water, and they had been suddenly whisked away. Misha never got to see their parents again, and Hannibal only did when they were killed in an attempt to pay ransom. He knows now that he was taken because of the status of his parents, but that did not exclude more common people from being taken. Will was still vulnerable.

Lady Murasaki had noted that he had a weakness for younger children.

"I'm not an adult, but you should be more careful. Don't talk to strangers at," he wrote.

Will looked up at him like he was the one who didn't understand. "Well you're a stranger," he pointed out.

Ask Hannibal took back the notebook to write back that he was, Will turned to his own backpack and pulled out a very large, dirty blanket and laid it atop the nursing puppies and all but the face of their mother. The dog whined gently and began licking at Will's hand. "It's okay Nilla, I'll be back tomorrow, promise," he soothed and rubbed behind her ears. The boy got up and brought over a large ceramic salad bowl with a chip missing, and poured water from his bottle into it. "Now be good, and take care of your babies."

Instead of confirming his status as a stranger, Hannibal asked after the meaning of the dog's name.

"Oh, I call her Nilla because her fur looks like Nilla Wafers, right? She's so pretty." Will stuck out his hand to help Hannibal up. "Come on Hanni-ball, moms and babies need lots of sleep or they can get sick."

Hannibal took the boy's hand, though he didn't need the assistance. Will chatted more about the sorts of things dogs needed to be happy and good throughout the rest of their trek out of the trees, but they parted ways at the sidewalk.

"Bye Hanni-ball, I won't talk to no more strangers today!"

He still worried about the boy the entire walk home.

Will was obviously more worried about the safety of his animals than that of himself. With that observation in mind, Hannibal packed extra meat in his lunch that he wouldn't eat and the next day sat at the same bench, waiting for those blue eyes.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> Sorry this took so long, I thought I would be able to post quickly while family visited but they are more time consuming to entertain than I thought. Updates might be slow for a while.
>
> On the plus side, things are starting to move along a little. I don't really have a plan, I'm just going where the characters take me, and so what I intended to be fluffy love may turn into a darker fic...

They met every day for the rest of the school week— Will somehow had found out how to pronounce Hannibal's name correctly, and the older boy missed the childish missaying. Hannibal had started to bring along various meats and, on Friday, a blanket his uncle had set aside for donation to a second-hand store which was fleece on one side and a sort of water proof tarp on the other. Will had smiled so large that Hannibal saw his missing tooth again, and Hannibal knew that the extra protection for Nilla would come in handy sometime that weekend, as the forecast predicted mild showers.

Friday, as they were leaving Nilla with her new blanket and an extra bowl of water, Will turned to Hannibal. A blush was on his cheeks and his eyes were cast down, though his body language spoke of a nervous excitement.

Hannibal set his hand on the boy's shoulder and squeezed gently as encouragement to speak.

"Uhm, Hannibal," Will paused, and made eye contact. "My dad is taking me fishing this weekend, and I was thinking it'd be nice if you came down to feed her-- Nilla?"

Hannibal nodded in reply, then squeezed again. Will obviously had more to ask than just that.

"Well, since you're already going to take care of Nilla, can you watch my other dogs too?"

Hannibal had a second of feigned surprise before he realized that it was really not very shocking at all to learn that Will had other animals he was taking care of. The boy obviously had a soft spot for strays, and was unusually dedicated to the cause for his age. Hannibal nodded his head in acceptance of the task, afraid to see disappointment in Will's eyes if he refused. He got pulled along briskly by the sleeve for his troubles.

"You'll love them, I promise, and they'll love you! Come on, don't be a slow-poke!" Will shouted ahead of them, too thrilled to even look back towards his tethered friend.

They visited two more solitary dogs. The first was a chihuahua mix with a severe underbite which Will explained had kept him from fending for himself within a pack. The second

looked like a Rottweiler which barked and growled madly at Hannibal, but tucked his tail back and licked submissively at Will. This one was kept within the fenced yard of an obviously abandoned house.

"It's okay Linen, Hannibal is super nice and he won't hurt you," Will cooed. "Linen is very sweet, really, but she's been chased off by lots of people before," the boy addressed Hannibal. "She's not ready to join the pack yet, other dogs freak her out, but she's good. You don't need to be scared, just-- give me your hand."

Will pulled Hannibal's hand over the fence and laced their fingers together for Linen to smell at the same time. Hannibal sniffed as well, scenting the area at the same time as the dog. It certainly didn't smell like fresh linens.

Will read it quickly and then looked up at Hannibal as if he should have already known the answer. "I saved her on Linen street, why else would she have a funny name?"

Hannibal was amused, though he didn't know if Will would appreciate it. Children had such an interesting way of viewing life-- Will probably had no attachment to names except knowing that certain ones belonged to certain people. Hannibal, however, had formed his identity around his name. As a young boy his name meant status and privilege. After learning the history of his family it meant a sort of vicious judgement of those beneath him. Since moving to the United States it meant an alien exoticness. He had learned to own all these things.

Hannibal smiled at Will and tried to hide the amusement behind it. As good an actor as he had become, Will certainly had a gift for recognizing the motivations behind people's actions.

"I don't think you can laugh at other people's names Hannibal," Will looked offended on behalf of the animal. "At least Linen's name means where she came from, your name doesn't even sound like its spelled--"

"William!" A rough voice rang out, causing Will to flinch, and Hannibal and Linen to stiffen defensively by his side. "Goddamn it boy, what'd I tell you 'bout coming home on time today?"

Linen started barking madly again and Hannibal turned to asses the man walking up, presumably Will's father. Red tinged his cheeks and nose, likely the result of alcoholism in the father and youthful exuberance in the son, and they both had bright blue eyes, but the resemblances ended there. Will's father had lank red hair peaking out beneath a baseball cap and a look on his face meaner than Linen's.

"That I should be home on time, sir, because we are leaving as soon as I get back from school."

"If you know well enough to remember, how come you never know well enough to actually listen." Will's father stalked over menacingly, and Hannibal readied himself to intervene before Will shot him a look. Hannibal often had a hard time interpreting the emotional displays of others, but this look he knew too well after having seen it many times on Misha's face. It said that Will could take what was coming and that they both knew if Hannibal

inserted himself things would turn out much worse. As if she could feel the energy behind it, Linen stopped barking and calmed to a threatening growl.

"I'm sorry sir--" the father took his son roughly by the arm and Linen sounded as if she would tear the man's throat out if there wasn't a fence in the way.

Will was meekly letting himself be pulled away, his father lecturing him on the value of obedience over filthy strays when the boy struggled to turn back and shouted. "The rest 're by Rico's, please don't forget to--"

Will was yanked again, in the same manner that Hannibal had seen some people yank their dog's leash to correct them.

He wondered if Will had such an affinity for beaten and abused animals because he was treated the same.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

> Not going to lie, this is probably not the best written chapter, and that's probably really saying something.

Hannibal fed Linen the rest of the roast beef he had brought along and, though she didn't attack him, they were both too agitated for it to be an exercise in trust building. Afterwards he wiped his hands off on a handkerchief and sanitized them, then looked up directions to the nearest Rico's on his smartphone. It ended up being a hole in the wall Mexican restaurant a few blocks away. His gait was easy but his mind was afire on his search for Will's pack.

Hannibal had not been close to his parents the way most children are, but they had been doting the way parents are meant to be. Children deserve the best in life while someone still has the power to give it to them-- not be treated so obscenely. The horrors Hannibal and Mischa had faced were more than the world could handle. Sometimes, Hannibal felt like he was teetering on the edge of either complete denial or complete acceptance of the horrors of humanity.

To deny it would be to let his memories collapse in on themselves like a black hole, devouring the past pain and everything he ever was-- to destroy the parts of Mischa that lived on within him.

To accept it would be to embrace his past as the natural consequences of being born human, and to perhaps commit such acts himself in the search for total understanding-- a betrayal of his dear sister.

So he balanced on the edge of a knife ground so fine he might cut himself upon in, but it was hard to stay so still and placid when his head and heart burned with righteous indignation.

He had wondered before that if he let himself willingly on the blade with half his soul on each side, it could be considered a compromise. To commit atrocities in order to punish atrocities.

It was difficult to remain unaffected when some people were just so rude.

When Hannibal arrived at the taco shop, there wasn't a pack of dogs roaming around. However, a quick inquiry with the cashier-- apparently Rico's brother-- confirmed that a young, curly haired boy often came by and asked after old food, which he then took down an alleyway just around the corner. The brother, his nametag read Lucas, commented on how the boy reminded him of his family's own rough beginnings and that he gave the boy day-old foods for free and often times slipped something warm and fresh on top.

Hannibal thanked the man and ordered three carnitas plates. He gave Lucas sixty dollars for what rang up as about twenty dollars worth of food. The man looked appreciative and a bit embarrassed, as if afraid that he had spoken too highly of the things he had done for Will. Hannibal, however, did not doubt that Rico's establishment and he family which owned it had done much to help Will, and did not believe that the change leftover could make up for what they lost in revenue feeding the boy and his dogs. He considered asking his uncle for lunch money to compensate for Will's needs, but ended up deciding against it. His allowance would pay off the debt within a month or two, and he enjoyed feeding the swans by the lake still. They reminded him of home.

With the food all balanced precariously on one plate, Hannibal walked slowly of to the alley. Though no dogs were visible, he could smell the musk of their dirty coats. The dogs were there, just hiding. He wondered if it was their own survival instinct or Will's paranoid instruction which caused them to run when humans came around.

Hannibal walked farther in, set the food down, and crouched low next to it. He then softly whistled the tune he had observed Will doing when approaching Nilla from the bushes. He was not even halfway through the short sequence when a bunch of dogs jumped out of or came out from behind the dumpster.

Some yipped and came to lick him, others went to sniff the food, but none ate until a very calm speckled dog thoroughly investigated Hannibal with his nose and took the first few bites. Then, they all dived in.

Hannibal basked in the chaos of their feeding and the order of the clear hierarchy. The speckled male seemed to be alpha but he pondered, if Will were around, which the pack would defer to. He could imagine the pack waiting impatiently for Will to take the first bite.

On e way home, Hannibal had much time to think. His fury was no longer a raging fire as it had been at first. Instead, after being soothed by observing those who cared for Will, Hannibal's temper had soothed to a deceptive snowy landscape-- peaceful only because it was quiet, but easily turning treacherous if one dared to venture into it. He had been before at the mercy of men with no self control, his sister had been a complete victim to them, and he would not allow Will to be made the same. Though Will was new to Hannibal's world, he felt intimately connected to the child. To see him eaten by a monster in sheep's clothing might destroy the balance Hannibal had on his knife.

Instead, preemptive measures had to be taken to protect Will and Hannibal by extension. His uncle and aunt certainly had the social standing to press an inquiry once Hannibal informed them of his concerns, but that felt impersonal and had the potential for lack of punishment if loyal Will did not testify against his father, which he surely would not. Any fear of punishment Hannibal could offer through threats would be merely transitory, and could likely lead to escalating violence to Will. No, justice must be strict and permanent.

Hannibal had hungered for the roast he had eaten after killing the men who had murdered his sister. Perhaps this time he could test a more sophisticated recipe for the meat.

Chapter 5

Will did not come out of the bushes to find Hannibal at the bench on Monday, but when Hannibal ventured back to where Nilla was kept, he found the boy laying back with several puppies on his stomach. Instead of the joyful laughter which usually resulted, Will was silent and despondent. The boy's blue eyes quietly assessed Hannibal as he came closer but he went back to staring at the dirt when Hannibal sat down.

Before Hannibal could get out his notebook and ask the boy how he was, Will pulled out a notebook of his own, already open to a page and written on. It read, "Today is a quiet day. Did you find them?", in handwriting clearly labored over yet still messy. Hannibal briefly recalled when he was about Will's age and he would copy advanced mathematical theories out of books he found, how his writing had been just as sloppy as his mind far outpaced his body.

"Yes, and I met Lucas as well."

A brief flicker of confusion crossed Will's face as he read the name, but then cleared with a small tick of a smile. "He is nice."

Hannibal nodded his head in agreement, but did not write back. Will quite obviously didn't want to converse much, and it took the young boy much longer to write out his replies than it did for Hannibal. So instead they sat together in peace and paid their attentions to the animals.

After nearly half an hour, they refilled Nilla's water bowls at a drinking fountain and walked together to the chihuahua. Even if Will could not muster up the will to speak, he still whistled out his tune to get the animal to come over. They petted him and Will brought outa few strips of what looked like beef jerky to feed the dog, then they moved on yet again to Linen.

Linen barked again as they approached, though this time she sounded excited and companionable instead of vicious. Will fed her much more than he had the chihuahua, which only made sense considering the dogs' respective sizes, but it bothered Will enough to pull out his notebook and explain.

"It's not that they are my favorites, but I have to take extra care of them if they can't walk around to beg for extras." It took minutes for Will to write it all, but Hannibal was patient.

After reading the message, Hannibal only nodded again in acceptance.

Will threw a tennis ball for Linen to chase after, and apathetically played tug-of-war on a rope crusted with mud and dog saliva. When he was done, he offered Hannibal both toys, however Hannibal chose to throw a stick he broke off a tree instead, not wanting to dirty his hands more than necessary. He had grown fond of Linen over the weekend, and he believed Linen felt the same, a camaraderie grown through the same will to protect. At the end of their play, Linen respectfully lowered her head to be petted, but did not lick at him the way she did to Will.

Hannibal sat next to Will, again joining him on the abandoned porch. Will laid back completely on the cement and touched his shoes to Hannibal's leg.

" 'M sorry I'm not good company," Will muttered so that Hannibal strained to hear even over the gentle breeze rustling nearby leaves.

Hannibal reached over slowly to circle his hand around Will's ankle and squeezed reassuringly. This solemn and unsociable behavior did not irritate him, as he knew that the cause of it had been harsh and even more displeasing. Will carried himself well, most likely acclimated to the struggle of compensating for an injury and concealing it at once. Hannibal, however, had spent years honing his observational skills and was blessed with a strong sense of smell. Not only did Will have the general scent of clotted blood and inflamed skin but he babied his back and shoulders, carrying his backpack in his arms and resting his back on the chilled cement.

Hannibal strained, his mouth moving like a landed fish and his throat convulsing beyond his control. He wanted to tell Will his life story, he wanted Will to understand that he had nothing to apologize to Hannibal for. Instead, he wrote a note asking if he could accompany Will on his way home. Left unwritten was his desire to tear Will's father apart, and that knowing where they lived would put his plan into action.

Will read the paper, top of the notebook bending over from the weight and Will's low grip. Instead of indifference or appreciative acceptance, the boy gave Hannibal a hard stare of suspicion. "Why?"

His instinct was to lie or oversimplify by claiming that he wanted to, but Hannibal could see the depth of meaning in Will's eyes and knew that the younger boy could see through him in that moment. He was cornered like a snake caught in the gaze of a mongoose. Hannibal's animal instincts left him still and breathing shallowly, not even blinking to break the electric eye contact.

Such a young child, such an inexperienced boy, could hardly recognize what he found in the depths of Hannibal, and that was the only thing he could believe in. Will's innocence.

Will looked away, confusion coloring his face, and Hannibal knew he had escaped by the skin of his teeth. To reaffirm his good intentions, Hannibal reached over to pat Will's legs again but Will flinched back and curled into himself. Baffled, Hannibal paused before stretching out farther to grasp the escaping appendage. Will whimpered like a struck dog and Linen's ears perked up from her resting position in the shade of the tree. She turned to face them and sniffed high in the air.

"What did I do?" Will asked, his words barely a breath.

Hannibal was perplexed for nearly a breath before his full awareness of the situation. Will had just seen a darkness in him, and had so little farm of reference for darkness that he could only compare it to that of his father. Hannibal's heart ached.

He pulled Will into his lap and held the boy tightly, as he wished for his mother to when he and Mischa Had first been taken. Will held on to him just as strong.

It wasn't until the boy got home, having walked alone, that he noticed a new note which read, "You can trust me. Let me help you."

Chapter 6

Hannibal decided to take his time in winning back Will's trust, though the boy hardly made it difficult. A few extra treats for all the dogs and a chocolate chip frappuccino was all it took. Of course, Hannibal played it safe even afterwards.

He did not ask again if he could follow Will home and the boy had three more quiet days throughout the month, inevitably accompanied by bruised or broken skin. Once, as they played and wrestled with the pack, the alpha dog took the bottom edge of Will's worn out shirt in his mouth and pulled gently enough that it only gaped open for Hannibal to see Will's entire torso through the stretched out neck hole. The boy's entire chest was a mottled mix of fading greens and yellows as a backdrop for more recent and vivid reds and purples.

One cannot really compare the magnitude of traumas, but Hannibal found himself thinking that Will had it worse than he had at the hands of Grutas. At least he never expected love out of his abuser, and he had been freed already. Though Will would not have to live in fear much longer, if Hannibal's plans ever came to fruition.

Hannibal waited inside the house where Linen was kept, two steaming mugs of chai and a couple ginger pastries beside him. Fall was already well underway, nearly every tree looked like a passionate sunset and the nights would soon be bitterly cold. Will had expressed his worry that Nilla and her puppies might not survive the winter alone, to which Hannibal suggested that puppies and a lame female might bring out the mothering instinct in Linen and be a good first step on working her into the pack. Will had looked at him like he was a messenger from God.

"Yes! And they can cuddle and keep warm, and if they like each other I can introduce Ogre because he's small like a puppy and they can be their own family!" Will had rattled off excitedly. Ogre, the chihuahua with an underbite, was one of the few dogs that refused to trust Hannibal and so he was less excited at the prospect. Still, he agreed that forming a pack of their own might increase all of the solitary dogs' chances of surviving the winter frosts. Which was how Hannibal ended up with house duty, as Will thought it was best that the strongest of them be with Linen to hold her back if she got 'mad'.

But Hannibal had been waiting for near half an hour, and that wasn't including the time it had taken to stop by the coffee shop for goodies. He was wrapping his scarf securely around his neck, anxiety throwing one horrible scenario after another to the forefront of his thoughts when Linen started howling and yipping happily out front. Clearly she had spotted Will. Hannibal finished tiring his scarf before stepping outside, irked at being made to worry.

Will was clearly visible, his backpack worn backwards so that the bag (probably full of tired puppies) rested against his chest with the front flap folded open. The boy had a huge smile on his face and was bent over to slap his thighs, making encouraging noises so that Nilla kept limping along slowly. Hannibal was relieved to see that this slow gait was the reason for tardiness and not any of the more violent scenarios he had let himself imagine: a beating so harsh that Will would remain silent forever, one of the neighborhood bullies Will had spoken

of taking their harassment to a physical level, or the poor sweet boy abducted with only Hannibal to care, as had been his original fear after having first met Will. To see, instead, Will's happy laugh as three of the puppies, pieces of string tied together for makeshift leashes, leap and howled back at Linen stirred a joy so spontaneous that Hannibal almost laughed along with him.

Hannibal restrained his wild relief and hooked a short leash onto Linen's new collar, which Hannibal had bought for the occasion. Both leather pieces were a bright blue and it had been impossible for Hannibal to pass them by, Will's eyes a picture in his mind. He smiled gently at the boy as Will cautiously opened the gate and herded in the dogs.

Hannibal knew that Will had been nervous about introductions, and admittedly Nilla shied away and Linen growled at first. However, the moment one of the puppies toddled into Linen's reach, she became docile and gentle. She nosed at the small body in front of her and bowed low until her ribs and hips brushed the ground. An encouraging whine had worked its way from her throat and then all the puppies came rushing towards her. Nilla too edged closer, more intrigued than guarding. Sooner than either had imagined the dogs seemed to be best friends, and the puppies in love.

Will nodded towards the leash and said, "Go ahead," so Hannibal unclipped it from the collar and sat back down on cold concrete steps. Will joined him within moments.

"You know, Hannibal," the boy said in tentative tone, scooting closer so their upper arms touched from shoulder to elbow as much as their height difference would allow. "I was afraid that Nilla wouldn't let Linen near her or the puppies, because she is always afraid that other dogs would hurt them. And one time, I think she killed another dog while she was pregnant, because she was afraid. But I knew that I could trust Linen, I was just still scared for Nilla. And I wanted to say that... I'm sorry I was scared of you, and I know I can trust you." Will leaned even closer, and rested his head on Hannibal's shoulder. "You can walk me home if you want."

Though he knew the same conclusion would have been reached whether or not he respected and treated Will as he did, Hannibal still felt as though that was the best earned victory he had ever achieved.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Two for talk of child abuse/strangulation and neglect.

Thank you to everyone who have kudosed and commented for reminding me that I even have this fic :) Sorry if it seems a bit disjointed, I wrote half of this a long while ago and half today.

The next chapter will most likely be the last, and it's already partly written, so keep and eye out for that ;)

Enjoy!

The walk to Will's house was not as peaceful as Hannibal had hoped it would be after the assurance of trust, but neither did Will seem to be nervous about the same things as previously: that Hannibal might use their closeness to hurt the younger boy. Instead, his poorly hidden glances between their shoes and clothing pointed at a deeply instilled embarrassment of his home and worth. Hannibal did not think he could judge Will as deficient in anything worthwhile, let alone something so crude and inconsequential as financial class.

To distract his companion, Hannibal prompted further discussion of the dogs by nodding in the appropriate pauses and smiling gently as encouragement. His fondness for Will could be unfortunate at times but it was moments such as this that made it worth it, when Will was insecure and looked to Hannibal for guidance. He was a delicate and precious soul, like dear Mischa.

Between elaborate hypothesis of animal psychology far beyond what Hannibal believed the creatures were capable of, Will would pause to take several large bites of the leftover ginger pastries. It was the boy's wild hunger which led Hannibal to be surprised that Will's kitchen didn't appear to lacking in food, though whether the monstrosities called white bread or boxed mac and cheese were edible was up for debate.

Will had Hannibal sit at the kitchen table, one of those odd-textured plastic fold ups that were popular for underfunded outdoor events. There were unidentifiable stains on the ceiling, the edges of the fake tile was pulling up off the ground where it touched the cabinets, and when Hannibal accepted the offer of a glass of water, Will pulled down a bright orange plastic cup and filled it at the faucet. He would never judge someone for their lack of money, but he certainly judged Will's father for his lack of taste.

"Uhm, I have a granola bar in my room if you're hungry, but I'm not allowed to touch the food in the kitchen so I don't have anything if you're super hungry, like for dinner, sorry," Will offered as he awkwardly squirmed into a chair at the table without pulling it out.

Hannibal was hardly surprised, he had often noticed that Will was too thin and often too hungry. It didn't stop him from feeling another flare of anger at the abusive and absent father. His vengeance would come soon, all he needed now was a way to protect Will from the results of his father's murder.

"I'm fine without, thank you," Hannibal jotted down after pulling out his notebook and pen. It was risky, and he worried it might upset the boy again, but still he asked, "How long have you gone hungry before?"

Will stiffened momentarily, but he quickly relaxed with a shy smile and a faint blush. The dear boy obviously took his confession of trust very seriously, and Hannibal hoped that soon that trust would be absolute and unconditional. "It depends, sometimes in other places I've not eaten for a few days, but here I sometimes walk Mr. Nelson's dogs and he will let me eat a TV dinner with him."

With an ache deep in his chest, Hannibal asked what was the scariest thing Will had ever been through.

"Well, one time..." the boy started slowly. "One time my dad took me to a bar with him and I distracted him so he lost the money, and he was mad. When we got home he was still mad and he put his hands around my neck like this," Will mimed choking himself with tiny hands on his small throat," and I couldn't breathe and I fell asleep even though I wasn't tired at all. It was the scariest thing ever, and I was crying when I woke up. Dad was crying too, and he told me it was just a nightmare, but I knew it wasn't."

He would do it as soon as possible, the pig didn't deserve as quick a death as Hannibal would need to give him but it would have to do. The sooner he freed Will from the clutches of his father, the sooner he could give the boy every good thing he deserved. "Is there anything I can do that would make it better?"

"I just want to be happy, and I want you to be happy, too, Hannibal," the boy replied, his eyes wide and guileless.

How could anyone who knew this child ever consider hurting him, Hannibal wondered as he plotted to do the very same thing. While Mischa was alive he had been an angel watching over her, doting and fierce. After her death, he had been a saint dying for the memory of her. Since meeting Will he has been reborn as a young god- detached from humanity and willing to punish sinners without regards to the consequences. He could see a future in which Will was scared or hated him, but not one in which he would allow such things to separate the boy from him. Will would become his child, a second Mischa.

"I want you to have everything you want," Hannibal gave Will, and it was not, at its foundation, a lie. The boy reached out across the table to grab Hannibal's hands and giggle lightly, as was common for his age.

"I am happy, with you and my dogs."

Hannibal smiled and held his sweet boy's hands. Will would be happy after the slaughter of his pig of a father, and Hannibal would deny him nothing of consequence. They will always be together, giving each other the best. His dear Will, love and responsibility combined.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Oh my goodness, this is it, we did it!

A few final notes:

There is murdery murder in this chapter, but I think you could tell that was coming.

This is the end of this part of the story, but I'm open to short prompts in this Universe until Christmas Eve :) I also have a few little plot lines in this Universe that I want to explore later, but I felt like this was a good endpoint for this arch of the story.

I love hannigram and will soon be starting a new story, most likely young hannigram again, as that's my jam.

And, last but not least, thank you to everyone who has been here since the beginning and everyone who just got here and made it to the final chapter. You're amazing, helping me grow as a writer by giving feedback and kudos and all that.

Enjoy!

With Will away feeding his dogs, there was no one likely to interrupt. Hannibal had both cased the house for weeks and asked leading questions of Will to come to the conclusion that Will's father had no friends except drink. So he knew it would be safe, but still he paused in the backdoor threshold momentarily. His hesitation and self-doubt faded in an instant, and the sound of shitty reality tv drew him to the living room.

The abusive pig was sprawled drunkenly at the foot of the ouch, his meaty arms on each side to prop himself up on the seat cushions. Hannibal had taken the largest chef's knife from his aunt and uncle's kitchen, not trusting the cheap and wobbly handles on those available to him at Will's. He took this knife out now, slipping it silently from the satchel at his side. He had learned from his previous experiences that he could not rely on adolescent strength to overpower men so much larger than himself. He needed surprise and a swift strike.

As he slank up behind the man his worries were forgotten-- of course if the kill itself would not be fulfilling, the process afterwards would make it all worthwhile. Will's safety later would make it all worthwhile. So he walked quiet and low, hidden by the arm of the couch and the sounds of a cat-fight on screen.

A quick leap and suddenly he was over, knife flashing. He was over eager, over confident, and the blade sliced deep from chin to jaw but it would not be a fatal cut. The pig squealed but his eyes still were not sober. Will's father lashed out with a reflexive backhand that's not

very well aimed. Hannibal no longer had surprise, but he still had the upper hand. A second lunge landed home. It was not as deep as intended, but the man was sure to bleed out in a matter of minutes.

Instead of attacking again, Hannibal went to the kitchen to heat up his pan. There was little enough time to get all the cleaning done before Will got home, and he had his own limitations for the things he was willing to feed his boy on their first real meal together that he had to move quickly. He wanted to give Will a fortifying meal to help him stand against the rough times to come, and also a dish that he would never have had before. So he had prepared a type of Korean rice porridge with chicken broth and many vegetables, but he also intended to sear strips of the pig to serve on top. The symbol of an end of old life in sacrifice for the new.

Hannibal was not delirious, he knew that it would most likely take some soothing and convincing on his part to settle Will, but he looked forward to it. Will deserved his time begging.

He walked back to the living room where the pig was gaping like a fish out of water and grasping his neck, blood still steadily pumping through his fingers. The flow came slower with each pulse and Hannibal reveled in it. The kill brought his instincts peace and the meal settled his heart. But having watched their eyes change from a semblance of humanity to the blankly stupid gaze of an animal raised for meat fed his ego. Despite being smaller and less cruel he was able to fell such a large beast. Not only would this protect Will, but it fulfilled in him a righteous purpose. He was finding himself.

It was this glimpse of what he would become that led Hannibal to the man on the floor before he was out of breaths, and take crude cuts of meat before the bleeding stopped. One day he had hoped to rip the organs out of someone living, but taking pieces of arms, back, and legs was plenty adventurous for the young killer. Will's father was gone before all the meat had been harvested, but Hannibal thought it was all well since his hand had started to shake with an adrenaline rush towards the end.

He cleaned up the cuts in the kitchen and laid them down to sear. The old, but still familiar, scent quickly wafted up and Hannibal took a moment to savor it. It was during this short reverie that he heard it-- the death march of all his dreams. The decisive snick as Will's key unbolted the door while his father's corpse was still out in plain view. His heart beat quick not with fear, but with some emotion close enough to it. He had planned out his timetable exactly, he should have had twenty minutes more at the least. He was so sure, that he had not planned for what to do if Will were to come in and see not just the end artwork of a feast but his whole horrifying process. Stunned with his failure, Hannibal stood indecisively in the kitchen even as his poor, sweet boy walked into the living room.

He tensed, but no piercing scream came. Instead there was a gentle gasp and the sound of the front door closing. Soft footsteps towards the couch, the body. Squelching as Will, his dark and curious child, played with his father's wounds. Hannibal smiled like a wolf and thought that perhaps everything was not lost after all.

More than anything he wanted to speak in that moment. His throat convulsed hard as he tried and tried until a croak came out. He repeated it and was finally able to call out, "Will," loud enough that the boy could hear it in the other room. Hannibal rounded the wall separating

them and took in the glorious sight of his boy up to his elbows in the blood of his abuser. A vision to behold, as if Mischa had risen from the dead to exact her revenge.

Will's blue eyes looked up immediately and there were tears falling over cherubic cheeks, but none of the hysteria or confusion one would expect of a child his age. His Will, always exceptional and always surprising.

"H-Hannibal?" The boy questioned demurely.

"Yes," he answered, his own voice rough from disuse and strain.

"My dad is dead. You killed him."

"Yes."

Will paused and his gaze returned to his father's corpse. "You killed him because he was mean, as punishment for hurting me. Made it so he can't hurt me again. But why did you cut him all up?" Those eyes returned to their rightful owner, and Hannibal rejoiced in the experience. The boy looked at him as he had when they first met, as though Hannibal's answer would determine Will's judgement of him for the rest of their lives. He welcomed the challenge of choosing his words wisely.

"I wanted you to taste his misery as he so often samples yours. But even more than that, I wanted you and him to see him as the animal he is. He has only two things he ever did well--giving me you, and providing meat."

Will did not look convinced, but he didn't look unconvinced either. It irked Hannibal that he couldn't read the child at such a crucial time.

Then, like the start of a misting rain, Will's face relaxed into gentle contentment. "Then let me have a taste," he said. Perfection.

They walked hand in hand to the bathroom sink and there Hannibal branded his knee against the cabinets so that Will could sit on his thigh and reach the faucet and soap on his own. The water swirled down pink as they both cleansed themselves of the blood. They then made their way back to the kitchen. Hannibal flipped the meat before it could crisp up too much and Will set the table with bowls, chopsticks, and soy sauce from Hannibal's backpack as he was instructed. Really, the boy was perfection.

After Hannibal had finished serving the food, and Will had taken his first bite of the meat and hummed at the taste, Hannibal began plotting.

"Do you remember if anyone saw you come into the house?" he asked the boy.

"No, not a lot of people are home yet, but usually when I get home later, there still aren't any people out," and so the questions and answers continued until Hannibal had worked out their plan.

"When we're done eating, I'll wash the dishes and both sinks, dry everything with a towel, and you'll put it in the middle of your laundry hamper. The knife I'll wipe down and put in

your trash-- the police will find it, but there is nothing to connect it specifically to me or my family, it's a common enough blade. Then, dear Will, we will have to act our parts. You have to touch your father again, there is already evidence you disturbed the body and if we're found with no blood on you, it will look odd. We'll have to scream, and you'll have to cry a lot and lie for me. Say that I was with you when you fed the dogs, and say nothing about how your father hit you or how he deserved this. Only cry and say you want your dad, and that you want me. The rest, my family's lawyers will take care of. Don't worry, sweet boy, you will be with me the rest of our lives. I'll protect you, don't worry about me."

They finished their meal in companionable silence, and after doing the dishes they donned their backpacks. Hannibal ruffled his and Will's hair so they would look more distraught. They held hands as they walked to the front door. No one was outside, but that would change soon. Will inserted and left the key in the door as they walked back inside, not closing it behind them.

"Don't forget to touch the body," Hannibal advised one last time.

They opened their mouths, and screamed.

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